

Airport Security Workers Accused

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CHICAGO (AP) - Private security workers at O'Hare International Airport were accused of allowing a man to pass through a checkpoint with several knives and a stun gun in his carry-on luggage.

Subash Gurung, 27, of Chicago, who told authorities he was unemployed, was arrested trying to board a United Airlines flight to Omaha, Neb., on Saturday night, said police spokesman Thomas Donegan.

He was charged with unlawful use of a weapon and attempting to board an aircraft with weapons, both state misdemeanors.

After being released on bail on those charges early Sunday, he was rearrested by FBI agents when he returned to O'Hare to retrieve his checked-in luggage and was charged with a federal felony count of attempting to carry a weapon on an aircraft, said Randall Samborn, a spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Chicago.

City officials said seven security workers, including one supervisor, failed to detain the Nepal-born Gurung after two folding knives were discovered in his pocket when he passed through a metal detector.

The workers did not notice seven other knives, a stun gun and a can of Mace when Gurung's bag went through an X-ray machine. Instead, they were found by United Airlines employees in the gate area who searched Gurung's carry-on bag, Donegan said.

"Something obviously went seriously wrong here, and we're trying to find out if it's the employees' fault," said Monique Bond, spokeswoman for the Chicago Department of Aviation. "If weapons were confiscated, he should never have been let through security."

It was not immediately clear why Gurung tried to take the weapons aboard the airplane. In a statement, the FBI said there was no allegation that terrorism was involved and said reports that Gurung shared an address with alleged terrorist suspects were not accurate.

The screening workers were hired by Atlanta-based Argenbright Security Inc., which operates the screening operations at United's terminal. The Federal Aviation Administration is investigating the incident.

Bond at first said she understood seven workers had been fired by Argenbright, but she said later that it was unclear whether they had been fired or suspended. At any rate, she said, they no longer had the city-issued badges allowing them to work at O'Hare.

In a statement, Argenbright said eight workers had been suspended. There was no immediate explanation of the discrepancy in the numbers.

United spokesman Joe Hopkins said Gurung was searched at the terminal gate as part of the airline's regular security procedures.

Last month, the FAA and the Transportation Department announced an audit of the screeners employed by Argenbright, which operates at 14 airports. Officials alleged Argenbright has failed to adequately check employees' backgrounds.

Lawmakers said the incident would provide ammunition in debates over anti-terrorism legislation pending on Capitol Hill. Democrats want the federal government to take over airport security, while President Bush and many Republicans say the security job should stay in private hands.

U.S. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., said officials would not have been able to fire the seven employees if they had enjoyed the civil service protection of federal employees.

But Rep. Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., maintained that the security system would never work unless those running it were federal employees, "like the Customs Service, like the FBI."